5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Bachajón

CHAPTER XV

THE NORTHERN TZELTAL TRIBES

Ever since leaving Zona Sala, we had been working in the country of the Tzeltal-speaking tribes who form an outpost of the Highland Indians. The Bachajon, of the Finca Encanto and Bachajon village, and the Indians of Ocosingo and the neighbouring valleys, living as they do, cut off from the outside world, strong in number, and of a rather independent disposition, gave us the first evidences of how little the Indian of the Chiapas Highlands has changed since the days before Columbus. The kings and priests are dead, the temples have been replaced by churches and Christian forms, but the Indians and labourers of today in many respects live the life that their humble forebears did five hundred years ago.

At this point, before describing our trip up into the true mountain country, it seems opportune to tell something of these people, their manners and customs. We did not have time to make an exhaustive study of any of them, but they were constantly with us as guides and labourers, and we passed through many of their villages. At El Encanto we had a chance to visit and examine the settlement of the finca's workmen, with the kind help of Señor Ciriaco Aguilar, who acted as interpreter and supplied us with invaluable information. Señor Arturo Tovilla helped us with the Linguistic Lists (see Appendix III), as well as describing many of the customs recorded in this chapter. Señor Aureo Cruz of Toniná dictated a Tzeltal Prayer and Conversation, which was analyzed with the help of Señor Manuel Bulnes of El Real. (See Appendix VI). In general it may be said that all the Spanish-speaking people with whom we dealt helped us in every way possible.*

The Bachajon (*Batcahon*) and Ocosingo Valley Indians are, as has been said, an outlying part of a large group living in the mountain country. They speak the Tzeltal language, belonging to that branch of the great Mayance stock more closely related to Maya. In the pine country of Chiapas they hold the largest share of land, occupying an irregular area running southeast from Simojovel to

*The written sources bearing directly on the ethnology of these people are very meager. Nuñez de la Vega (1702) gives the best account of the early religion; his section on Magnalium has been reprinted by Pantaleon (1908) along with an important selection of other early sources. Licenciado Vicente Pineda (1888) in his account of the Indian uprisings, gives some information, together with the most complete linguistic material. He gives a native calendar, probably based on one published by Emeterio Pineda (1845). Of modern scientific works, Starr (1901 and 1903) has ethnographic material, and publishes the only physical measurements (1902). Seler (1908) goes into the calendar in detail. For comparative material Tozzer (1907) and Sapper (1925) have been our chief reliance. Sapper's "Nordliche Mittelamerika" (1897) was in constant use in the field for information on all subjects. Particular references are given as they occur. Prof. Rudolph Schuller kindly allowed me access to his manuscript material.

"giving the head" to certain elder women, but the reason could not be ascertained.

Marriage is an economic and social affair, apparently free of religious significance. Don Arturo Tovilla of Cacate-el, gave us a description of the manner of seeking a wife, which is here paraphrased. It will be seen that the importance, ceremonially, centers on the contract with the parents, while the actual joining in marriage is not stressed.

The boy's father goes with the boy to the girl's house, both dressed in their best clothes, and carrying a gift of three bottles (pints) of aguardiente "and some animal." His father tells the girl's father that his son wishes to marry the daughter; to which the answer is to call the girl and ask her if she likes him. She says nothing, but keeps on scratching the wall with her finger and the floor with her toe, thereby indicating that she likes the boy, while showing the proper maidenly modesty. The latter gives her a coloured handkerchief, pearl beads, etc., with which the contract is sealed.

The boy is obligated to bring to her house what the father may ask, such as corn, beans, aguardiente, as well as to help in the work for a year. He makes a social visit each Sunday, which the girl must receive. At the end of the time appointed by the parents, he takes her to his house.

If the girl does not signify her consent in the manner described, the match does not take place.

When the parents of one or both parties do not countenance the match, it may happen that the children, taking the law into their own hands, run away. The procedure in this case has become formalized so that, while unpleasant enough to act as a deterrent, it recognizes this as a regular manner of marrying. This description also is paraphrased from Señor Tovilla. [115]

When the parents forbid, but both children desire the match, after the boy has gone to the girl's house and been refused, his obligation of respect is ended. He builds a house in a retired place in the jungle. He and the girl meet to make their plans where she goes to get water, for which purpose she may often choose a spring a kilometer or more from her house. At an appointed time, they run away.

When he has carried her off and hidden her, his parents must go and apologize to hers. The girl's father tells the boy's not to leave before being punished. He, however, finds and brings in the couple, who kneel before the girl's parents. The boy's shirt is taken off, and

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9

he is whipped by the girl's father for a thief. The girl is stripped to the waist and whipped by her mother. With this the marriage is legalized. As the first act of their true married life, the girl makes posole and offers it to her parents. The boy is under obligation to bring presents of bread, chocolate, aguardiente, etc., to his parents-in-law.

There are no formal restrictions of marriage, but the Church exercises a general influence against wedding brother and sister, cousins, or other relatives forbidden by Christian doctrine. In this, owing to the disposition of the Indians, and to the purely tribal character of marriage, which is not regarded by them as a religious or governmental matter, the Church is only partially successful. Informal unions actually do occur between brother and sister, apparently without any ceremony, the pair merely continuing to live together, their family relationship slowly changing into that of a married couple. That such a wife's status has some regularity in their eyes is shown by the fact that she has the same position in funeral rites as an ordinary wife.

It is probably due to the negative influence of the Church that the various important crises in the life of an individual, ordinarily marked by such colourful ceremonies among primitive people, here are distinguished by very little of ritualistic observance. For description of the main events in the life course, we were again dependent on Señor Tovilla, whose information, given with little change below, checked entirely with the result of other inquiries. The funeral ceremonies were observed at first hand, after the fight described at El Encanto; for them, accordingly, I have used my own notes.

When a woman is about to give birth to a child, a midwife—an older woman with some knowledge of herbs—is summoned. A few days before parturition, the woman is carefully tended by the midwife, well fed with choice food, and provided with a little rum. At the moment of giving birth, the midwife prays that the child may be brought forth happily. The mother kneels, and the midwife prepares to receive the child with a new cloth. Meantime the father is told to stay outside the house, or may be allowed to help in minor matters.

It is said that at Tenejapa the women go out into the woods to give birth untended, coming back with the child.

The baby is given Christian baptism.

A child's soul is considered to be particularly delicate, and therefore liable to magic influence. If the people of the house must go

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango
Tzotzil NV11

The men are tallish and the majority of them have sparse, black beards. They wear plain, white cotton tunics and short trousers, sashes, and hats of the sombrero type. The women wear the usual short, blue skirts. Their blouses are cut with a square neck, around which are embroidered three bands, each about two centimeters wide, of red, yellow and red. At the corners, little imitation tassels are embroidered in the same colours.

We were told, by an unreliable informant, that this village was remarkable for its independence. Its officials are chosen by the natives alone, and run through a regularly prescribed *cursus honorum* from secretary up to president, and then on to the council of elders. Government laws and orders sent to the village are debated by this council and are not published unless approved by them.

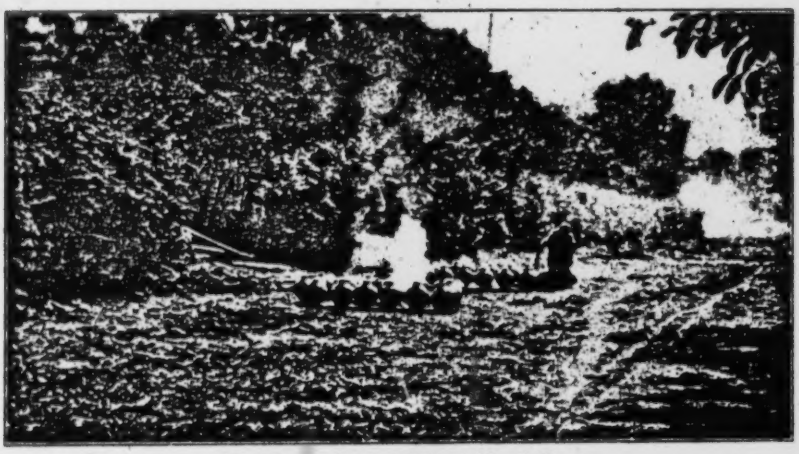

FIG. 333—Amatenango, Chia. Pottery baking.

We were also told that in case of marriage each party works for his or her prospective in-laws, and that the girl at that time learns pottery making, taking over the mother-in-law's specialty.

While there was no way of checking up on this information, it is true that there is no Maestro at Amatenango, and that the Indians seem to be an unusually self-respecting and self-reliant lot. Of all the Tzeltal people observed, they were the only ones who seemed to compare with the Zotzil-speaking Chamulas in energy and prosperity.

Returning to ourselves and our trip. We left Tenejapa on the following morning by a winding, broad road climbing to a pass in

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9

194
193 lish "met," short *i* (*ĭ*) as in English "mix," long *u* (*ū*) as *oo* in English "boot," and short *u* (*ŭ*) as in English "hut." *E* represents a sound between *ŭ* and English *er* in "water." *O* is a sound like English "or" said while holding the mouth for *u*. Diphthongs are *ai*, *oi* and *au*.

Double vowels are always to be pronounced separately, the second having a slightly shorter quantity than the first.

Accent is indicated by ′ in those words in which the stress does not fall on the last syllable.

000 INFORMANTS. The Chontal List was taken down by Mr. William Gates from two pure-blooded Indians of Tecoluta, Tabasco. It was made at Comalcalco. Mr. Gates' spelling has been revised to accord with the other lists, as far as possible.

Two Yocotan lists were made, the first, from José Hernandez, a young Indian of San Fernando, Tabasco, at Macuspana. The second was given, together with the ethnographic information, by Lázaro Hernandez Guillermo, a man of forty or forty-five, also of San Fernando; he had a little Ladino blood on his mother's side. This man, although illiterate, was remarkably intelligent, and was by all odds the best informant that we had in the course of the trip. The list was made at leisure on board the steamer, and he was by that time thoroughly at home with us, and acquainted with our methods and wishes. He showed some, limited, ability to analyze his own grammatical forms.

124 The first Tzeltal list was given by Sebastiano Guzman, a Bacha-
126 jon shaman, at El Encanto in Chiapas. It was supervised by Don
115 Arturo Tovilla, who was thoroughly conversant with the language. The second was given, also at El Encanto, by Fidencio Morales, a Ladino house-boy from Ocosingo, who was not satisfactory. The third was taken down from Don Ciriaco Aguilar at Bachajon. Señor Aguilar had been assisting in Ethnological work for over two weeks, and spoke Tzeltal fluently. He was assisted by a volunteer committee of Indians and Ladinos.

000 The Chaneabal list was compiled at El Puente, near Comitan, from an Indian estimated at thirty-five years of age, called Casimiro Gomez. He was moderately satisfactory.

Two Jacalteca lists were made. The first, at Jacaltenango in Guatemala, was given by Santiago Hernandez, a middle-aged Indian of doubtful purity, with occasional help from other Indians. He was literate, fairly intelligent, and enthusiastically coöperative. The second was hastily taken down at Concepción. It was begun by Alonzo Rafael Alvebal, pure-blood, about thirty years old, who

7: Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

the roots of each plant so that it will be protected. One farmer commented on this process: "The face of the earth remains loose. Thus the corn remains of one heart. Nothing dies because the soil is moved, and the tender shoots begin to grow. When the second hoeing is finished, God looks at it to see that the corn matures." In the second hoeing, any corn which has grown between hillocks is pulled out so it will not deprive the main stalks of strength.

When the corn has matured, the stalks are doubled over to hasten the drying process. The mature cobs are left on the doubled-over stalks for about two weeks to ensure the maximum drying of the kernels before har-

TABLE 6. Schedule of Activities in Corn Production

Activity	*Month*	*No. of days necessary for task*	*Helpers*	*Tools*
Clear irrigation ditches	Oct.	6		Machete, forked stick
Fence fields	Nov.	4		Machete, ax
Cut stalks of last year's crop; burn leaves and weeds	Dec.	4		Machete, forked stick
Plow land 3 times	Jan.	3	Oxen	Plow
Clear irrigation ditches	Feb.	2		Machete, forked stick
Irrigate land and leave 6 days	Feb.	2		
Select seed and put in water, leaving overnight	Mar.	1	Wife	
Measure rows and distance between hills so there will be 5 handspans between each hillock; plant corn	Mar.	1		Digging stick, string, net bag
Irrigate planted corn	Mar.	1		
First hoeing	Apr.	4	2 or 3 men	Hoe
Second hoeing	May	3	2 or 3 men	Hoe
Fix irrigated ditches	June	1		Machete
Outside employment	July–Aug.			
Double over corn and leave 15 days	Sept.	4		
Pick corn; put in net bag and degrain cobs with few kernels; carry home harvest.	Oct.	5	Wife, horse	Net bags, sticks,

SOURCE: Information from a farmer possessing ½ hectare of irrigated land in center. He has no sons and one married daughter, whose husband works in sawmill.

7: Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

which there is a black variety and a colored variety, and (2) climbing beans, of which there are four subclasses: "painted," white, yellow, and black. Beans must be grown only in irrigated lands of highest productiv-

TABLE 8. Schedule of Activities in Wheat Production

Activity	Winter wheat	Summer wheat	No. of days necessary for task: Winter wheat	Summer wheat	Helpers	Tools
Clear land	Dec. 7	May 12	5	2	2 paid workers	Machete, forked stick
Irrigate land; leave soaking	Dec. 7	May 15	1	1		
Plow	Dec. 15	May 23	1	2	Oxen team	Plow
Sow seed broadcast; cover, crossing over twice	Dec. 16	May 24	1	1	Oxen team	Plow
Cut wheat	May 1	Oct. 5	2	2	2 or 3 unpaid workers	Scythe
Thresh						
Carry wheat to shelter	May 3	Oct. 7				Net bags
Horses trample wheat	May 4	Oct. 8				
Shake stalks	May 5	Oct. 9	3	3	4 or 5 unpaid workers, 5 horses	Forked stick
Scoop grains into wooden box and sift to get rid of chaff						Box with wire mesh
Put grain in burlap bags; carry to houses on horseback						Burlap bags

[115] SOURCE: Information from two informants, one who grows winter wheat and the other who grows summer wheat, both cultivating ½ hectare of irrigated land.

ity. The land in the center, except for the fertilized corral areas, has lately yielded a very poor harvest. People say that the soul of the bean departed when they introduced the crop to their ejido plots in hot country. The scheduling of bean production is shown in Table 9.

7: Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

Guarding the crops. The crops must be guarded against intruders. The farmers sometimes sleep in the fields when they expect animals to steal the ripening corn. They observe the habits of these intruders and develop belief systems which help them organize opposition:

The raccoon steals maize seeds. He pushes down cornstalks when they are in elote and steals the cob. He is very smart. He can tell whether the owner is sleeping or not by putting his hand on his own anus. If his anus is cold, the owner is awake; if it is hot the owner is asleep and he enters.

Some men who live below in Alannantik have good dogs. They planted their milpa, and the next night wanted to hunt. "You stay with one dog,"

TABLE 9. Schedule of Activities in Bean Production

Activity	*Date*	*No. of days necessary for task*	*Helpers*	*Tools*
Cleaning and preparation of soil is same as for corn (Table 6)				
Ground beans				
Plant between rows of corn	Mar. 1	2	3 exchange workers	Digging stick
Cultivate	Apr. 19	3	2 exchange workers	Hoe
Harvest, pulling up entire plants and putting them in burlap bags	July 10	2		
Store in eaves of house				Burlap bags
When pods are very dry, beat bag with stick to depod beans	Sept. 1	2	women of household	Stick
Pole beans				
Plant, following the second hoeing of corn, setting seeds near each hillock of corn	May 2	1		Digging stick
Wind the vines up on corn stalk; tie	June	1		
Cut pods and store in burlap bags in eaves of house	Nov.	1		Burlap bags
Shell beans as they are used				

SOURCE: Same as for Table 6.

304 The traumatic experience of his first day in school is recounted by a man now sixty-eight years of age. He was thirteen in 1918, the first year that compulsory education was introduced into the town. In the Eyes of the Ancestors

I was in my house when I heard the civil authorities call the children to school. The police came to tell me to go to school. I did not go because my mother wanted me to accompany her on the road to Teopisca. On our way to Teopisca, the inspector saw me and asked me why I didn't go to school. My mother replied, "I am a widow. He came with me because I seek for what we eat. Therefore he must go with me."

The inspector did not hear her words. Since he was mounted on horseback, he said to me as I was walking, "Come here, boy. Don't walk on foot, climb up on the horse." I was embarrassed to climb up on the horse, and I had some fear because I had never ridden on horseback. I began to cry. "Don't cry," he said. "You are only going to school. The schoolmaster will not beat you." It is then that my mother said, "Señor, don't take him. See that there is no one else to accompany me on the road. When I come home, there will be no one to do errands."

But the inspector feared nothing. His heart was hot, hot. A man came by and told the inspector that I did not know how to ride and that I was afraid. The inspector said, "If he doesn't know how to ride, then you take him." But the man replied, "But I don't want to. It is better that I go get wood. You take him by force if you can, Señor. I go before your face" [*a way of excusing himself*].

I didn't want to go, and I just cried because I didn't want to. The inspector seized me, and put me on horseback. I was afraid to get up, and I cried and cried from fear. He said, "Stop it! Let us go!"

And so he led the horse with me on it. My mother cried when she saw the inspector take me off on horseback. She remained very sad as I left, since she no longer had a companion. I went on to school, and the inspector handed me over to the schoolmaster.

The schoolmaster gave me a paper with my name, which I didn't know. I did not hear what was said in that large school because I did not know Spanish. The schoolteacher asked me, "What are you called, little boy?" I cried a great deal because I felt sad for my mother whom I had left in